Prophetic Educational Planning – An Avenue From Self-development into Social Justice: A Quranic Approach
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Abbas Ali Shameli

Abstract

In this paper I have attempted to investigate and discuss Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Sadr’s theory of culture and values development, focusing on the challenge of human inner conflict and his explanation of Prophetic educational planning. As I have illustrated here in this paper, Sadr’s key concern is to shift the focus of development from a macro-social into the micro-individual level. An Islamic model of development, as Sadr sets out, is first and foremost one for human values development. For Sadr, culture and values development must precede any other kind of development for a Muslim society, where the practice of Islamic values is a way of life and a journey towards God.

Values education then should be prophetic education which focuses on teaching people how to develop themselves and accordingly to reach God. Sadr also argues that social development cannot be obtained without the establishment of social justice. The establishment of the latter should be based on culture and values development, which profoundly relates to the resolution of human inner values conflicts. At this point he adds that prophetic education plans to move individuals from self development into sustainable social justice. In Prophetic educational planning, therefore, a particular process of conscientization, purification and teaching the rationality & revealed texts are three steps of a Prophetic pattern of educational planning.

Characteristics of the Prophetic Education in the Qur’an

I observe that prophetic education is well explained in Qur’an. Addressing the Prophet Muhammad, the verses reveal:

*Read (the Qur’an) in the Name of your Lord Who created.* (96:1).

*He created humankind from a clot.* (96:2).
Read! And your Lord is most Honorable (96:3).

Who taught (the use of) the Pen. (96:4).

He Who taught humankind what he/she knew not. (96:5).

It is worth mentioning that in this chapter of the Qur’an, the first revealed, the creation of humankind is associated with divine education and teaching. Among the first messages to the Prophet Muhammad, the Qur’an mentions the significance of learning and teaching. The prophet is called to start reading the received verses of the Qur’an. This reading must be associated with the Name of both the creator and the educator. As a sign of His highest honor, Allah taught humankind through the pen and divine writings. By sending prophets and divine Books, Allah taught what people did not know. He also created humankind endowed with the ability to learn through writing, reading and communicating. If any human being suffered from a shortage of this capability, he/she learned nothing.

To educate human beings and to facilitate the actualization of their capability of learning, God sent numerous prophets. Therefore, the Qur’an considers the Lord as the first educator of humankind. Laying emphasis upon the significance of divine education, the Qur’an 55:2 regards the teaching of the Qur’an as the best and most important sign of God’s beneficence. Tabataba’i observes that this fact will be clearer if we note that the teaching of the Qur’aãn in this chapter precedes even the phrase which mentions the creation of humankind. The reason is perhaps the fact that the Qur’an includes the explanation of human prosperity and way of life (Tabataba’i 1970, vol. 19, 94).

I should also mention that in this section, I have looked at education in its broad sense, as a tool that creates self-consciousness about one’s inner and outer possibilities of self-development. This education saves humankind from wandering and alienation. Therefore, it includes both formal and informal training, including prophetic education.

To provide a clearer definition of prophetic education, I must refer to the Qur’an’s explanation of it. This education I presume is the very foundation of social and individual change. In Qur’an, 13:11 it is stated that social change, whether it improves or destroys, is essentially due to a change in individuals. Individuals think, evaluate, decide and behave in accordance with their personalities. A decisive element in forming human personalities is values education. Values education is the key to creating change in individuals.

Therefore, the prophets first attempted to change individuals from within (values and ideals change). As the Qur’an reveals (3:164, 2:129, 62:2) the key aim in sending prophets is to mention to people the divine signs, to purify them of immoralities, and eventually to teach them the contents of the divine books and the clues of living wisely. The key elements (notification, purification and divine education) proclaimed in these verses are the pillars of prophetic education and the main stages of self-development.
These elements help people to develop themselves in order to be able to establish social justice. Social justice emerges when all individuals are well educated in terms of values. The establishment of social justice as the second aim of prophetic education is restated in another verse. Qur’an, 57:25 reveals that the provision of prophetic education, providing evidence, divine books and behavioral standards are all tools for the establishment of social justice. These elements are provided by prophets in order to help people to achieve the latter. Prophetic education, therefore, touches both individual and collective levels. It acts as an intermediary between individual and social change. In his theory of individual and social development Sadr attempts to highlight the link between these two aspects.

For me, prophetic values education aims at training people based on divine standards, improving individual behavior through the establishment of piety and facilitating the bases of social justice. Prophets educate people to translate their spiritual potentialities. They teach humankind to build a just, God–centered life in this world. This will emerge and form human lives in the hereafter, too.

To illustrate the third basis of Sadr’s theory, I assume that beyond the first relationship with God on the bases of creation and the prophetic education of individuals there are three different relationships established. One relates each individual to him or herself, the second deals with other individuals (society) and the last connects him/her with the natural environment. In his volume on the Islamic moral system as is reflected in the Qur’an, Misbah Yazdi discusses all three of these types of human relationships in relation to God, self, and society (Misbah 1997, vol. 1, 242–3). To the extent that every person is educated by prophets and reflects their teachings, the relationship that he/she has with himself/herself, with nature (utilizing natural resources in order to meet his/her needs) and with other people (in social interactions) are different. The Qur’anic social norms, discussed by Sadr, mainly focus on the second and the third of these types of relationships. The third basis of Sadr’s model, as I shall explain, contains his analysis of human relations with nature.

**The Human Link with Nature**

The third basis in Sadr’s theory, therefore, describes the way in which each person reacts to Allah and to prophetic education in terms of his/her relation to nature and society. This, indeed, indicates the reaction of each person against the teachings of prophets. Individuals sometimes utilize nature and natural resources in order to meet their needs. At other times, they interrelate with other people in an effort to shape their social life. Although these relationships are relatively independent at first glance, they are Qur’anically interrelated and create feedback for one another. This interrelationship can be deduced from verses in the Qur’an. Sadr tries to show the correlation between these two types of relationships through a theoretical framework within the concepts of the Qur’anic verses.

In his/her relationship with nature, every individual strives to acquire the most and the best results. This attempt entails the quality of life. According to the Qur’an, when human beings have full control over nature and enjoy more and better means of production, leading to a feeling of wealth and richness, they
are more likely to try to oppress and dominate others in their social relationships. This stage is the starting point of the discussion of the Islamic culture of development and the necessity of cultural and values development. Sadr attempts to explain how the Islamic culture of development and values education can influence the pattern of development and social change.

The argument is that when individuals have not yet internalized piety and self-control (lack of the prophetic values education) they most likely tend to extend their wealth and power to the furthest extend possible. This intention motivates the privileged to extend the scope of their power to society. They plan to conquer the peak of social power and social status. This requires them to pass by many citizens. It is revealed in Qur’an:

*Humankind is most surely inordinate (and transgresses all bounds), when he/she sees him/herself free from want.* (96:6).

Again, in a corresponding verse, the Qur’an, emphasizes:

*And if Allah should increase provision for His servants they would certainly oppress/revolt in the earth.* (Qur’an, 42:27).

For Sadr, these two verses allude to the fact that an individual’s unjust and immoderate social behavior is the consequence of his/her excessive access to better and more qualified tools of production and natural resources. In human history the opponents of the prophets were always the owners of wealth and power. It must not be forgotten, however, that Sadr explicitly disagrees with Marx who asserted that the concentration of the tools of production and wealth in one small part of society makes the possessing class oppressive and dominating. Sadr observes that, as the Qur’an reveals, the roots of all kinds of social disorders and conflicts are found within individual human natures (Sadr 1978, 208–9).

When an individual has not internalized the prophetic values teachings and lacks piety (*taqwa*), he/she tends to utilize his/her wealth and power in an oppressive way. This tendency comes out of his/her self concept as a wealthy person with control over natural resources. Oppression, according to this point of view, is the result not of wealth and power but of values illiteracy. Those who are not prophetically educated attempt to utilize their wealth to extend their hegemony over other people. In his theory of conflict, as I will explain it, Sadr refers all social tensions to an unsolved inner conflict (Sadr 1978, 220).

My explanation here is that economic, political and human development in an Islamic society is not sustainable if it does not occur within an Islamic cultural context. The Islamic culture of development means to install a religious values system through prophetic education in order to make the development pattern value-laden. Sadr argues that social oppression derives from an unsolved inner conflict. This is, in turn, rooted in values illiteracy and involvement with un–divine ideals. To Sadr, when citizens overcome natural resources and feel powerful, their inner conflict will find new patterns of expression at a social level. Wealth and the feeling of being privileged provide a psychological background for people to project their inner conflict in dominant–subordinate power relationships. Inner conflict is unsolved
while individuals suffer from values and ideals illiteracy (Sadr 1978, 225–6).

To support this idea, Sadr compares the people in developed and industrialized societies with similar people in simple and undeveloped societies. He comes to the conclusion that the oppressing relationship is a characteristic of the rich and powerful in the developed societies, those who neither morally nor prophetically educated. If we look at simple and underdeveloped societies such as those of aboriginals, we will find that there is less of a possibility that there are citizens who enjoy a considerably high level of wealth and power. Hunting, fishing and simpler processes of production provide for a minimum level of the requirements of life. Therefore, power relationships cannot be so damaging. People in these societies usually strive to have access to a minimum level of natural resources which enable them to overcome everyday difficulties and wait for tomorrow’s struggle. They are happy that they can escape hunger, poverty and premature death. Therefore, citizens are less likely to think of oppression and hegemony over one another.

Developed societies that have access to modern tools of production can overcome nature to an amazing extent. The discovery of steam power, electricity, electronics, computers and artificial intelligence have empowered the citizens of developed countries, allowing them to modify productive instruments both qualitatively and quantitatively. Mass production, consumerism and socio-political competition are some features of privileged and wealthy societies with access to modern technology. This access has facilitated the human ability to overcome natural resources. Full access to wealth and power changes the pattern of power relationships. For Sadr, this increases the possibility of a pattern of dominant-subordinate power relationships. This, of course, is a reflection of an unresolved inner conflict. Sadr does not deny the possibility of oppression in a simple society. The possibility, nonetheless, increases when citizens enjoy a considerable level of wealth and power.

The final element in his socio-educational theory is an inner individual conflict which derives from values illiteracy. Sadr argues that, usually, the development of the tools of production, and full access to nature and natural resources result in inner conflicts being reflected at the social level through various forms of social tensions. Then the solution for any social conflict must be sought within human beings (Sadr 1978, 224–5). The key element will be values education, I assume. To Sadr, social relationships are always the expression of the inner structure of individuals. Inner structure is influenced by ideals and values which are formed based on one’s philosophy of life (Sadr 1978, 226).

Examples of the previous prophets and their campaigns against the rich indicate that the concentration of wealth and power has frequently changed their attitudes and the values system. As evidence for this claim the Qur’an alludes to the stages of unbelievers’ campaigns against prophets, as Rafsanjani argues. First, they rejected the prophets as leaders. When the Prophet Muhammad, for instance, invited the Meccans to accept Islam they replied: “Why was not this Qur’an revealed to a man of importance in the two towns?4 (43:31).” This verse implies that the rich believed in a social stratification based on wealth and power. It was therefore difficult for them to accept the prophecy of a poor man. When they
lost their campaigns against the prophets at this stage, the opponents of the prophets changed their objection and asked:

“Shall we believe in you while the meanest follow you?” (Qur’an, 26:111).

It is worth mentioning that Rafsanjânì also picks up the same message from these verses which are revealed in various other chapters (Rafsanjani 1991, 220–1). It should also be maintained that the struggle over social sovereignty as indicated in the Qur’an takes place between pious people and the impious holders of wealth and power. Wealth itself does not carry any positive or negative connotations. Therefore, the Qur’an presents the case of Sulaiman, the wealthiest prophet in human history (Qur’an, 37:35).

However, he was a prophet and piety (taqwa) directed his power towards the establishment of social justice. What the Qur’an opposes is the sort of oppressive sovereignty which is derived from a wealth detached from religious culture and values (Rafsanjani 1994, 190).

The Human Link with Society

To complete the fourth element of his theory, Sadr maintains that the individual’s relationships with nature and society are bipolar. He adds that as human relationships with nature as well as full individual ownership of natural resources influence social interrelations; the latter, according to the Qur’an (7:96), also has an impact on the extent and the quality of people’s access to natural resources. Sadr hypothesizes this part of his theory as to refer to this norm: just and pious distribution of wealth and power in a society will lead to a full access to natural resources and an inclusive mood of production.

As long as social relationships are just, based on divine values like taqwa, brotherhood and compassion, and are free of oppression and tyranny, societies will have more and better access to nature and natural resources. This positive relationship is inclusive of both the earth and the heavens (Sadr 1979, 226–27). The words heavens and earth (alsama’ wa al-ard) in this verse refer to full access to natural resources both above and below the earth.

One can see the difference between two models of development in the above-mentioned verse. One type contains religious culture and values (faith and piety) while the other is religiously values–free. The former is the result of social justice and individual purification, while the latter leads to social hegemony and oppression.

Citing the Qur’anic evidence for his discussion about the relationship between social justice and a full access to natural resources, Sadr refers to the following verses.

1 “And that if they (Pagans) should keep to the (right) way, We would certainly give them to drink of abundant water.” (Qur’an, 72:16).
2. “And if they (Jews and Christians) had kept up the Tawrât (Torah) and the Injil (Bible) and that which was revealed to them from their Lord, they would certainly have eaten from above them and from beneath their feet.” (Qur’an, 5:66).

3. “And if the people of the towns had believed and guarded (against evil), We would certainly have opened up for them blessings from the heaven and the earth...” (Qur’an, 7:96).

Keeping to the right way, behaving in accordance with the contents of the Tawrat (Torah) and Injil (Bible) and believing in God and guarding oneself against evil (acquiring piety) is revealed in these verses as expressions of just social interactions, Sadr argues (Sadr 1979, 227). He observes: (the quality of) Human relationships with nature are correlated to the (extent of) establishment of justice in human relations with their fellows. Whenever justice is flourished in human relations with his/her fellows more and more, their relations with nature will accordingly be flourished. If, on the contrary, justice goes absent from the first line, flourishment will be absent from the second line. It means that a just society puts flourishment in human relations with nature, but a tyrannical society keeps these relations unflourished. (1979, 227)

If we compare the meanings of these verses and consider the context that they were revealed in, we will understand Sadr’s interpretation. In commenting on these verses, Sadr states that the amount and the quality of access to natural resources in a society basically depends on the way that its people behave in their social life and how they establish their social relationships. The central idea in these verses, especially when we consider the context of the preceding verses, is the importance of social justice.

These three verses, as Sadr interprets them, reveal a relationship between the establishment of faith and social piety, social justice and maintenance in the right way, on the one hand, and abundant production and access to an immense amount of natural resources on the other. I assume that these verses link sustainable development with the establishment of a specific culture and values system first in individuals and then at the social level. The core elements in this culture or values system is: faith and piety and, more comprehensively, behaving in accordance to the content of revealed books.

I have to add here that a value-laden full access to natural resources does not lead to oppressive behavior because it is, as the Qur’an reveals, the outcome of faith and piety/self-control (Qur’an, 7:96/amanu wa ittaqaw). These values are acquired by the individual before he/she has any access to wealth or power. They have approached the question from the root. Just social relationships are indeed a manifestation of internalized values of faith and piety. These values are imparted when the members of a society follow the prophetic instructions. This kind of immense wealth is the consequence of a just social life. Therefore, it does not lead to an unjust social pattern.

I also would like to highlight a complementary point which helps to clarify the message in the above-mentioned verses. Tabataba’i observes that the interrelationship between a person’s social misbehavior and his/her denial of a good standard of living (lacking sufficient access to natural resources) is
mentioned in other verses of the Qur’an. By contrast with the content of the verses referred to earlier, these other verses reveal the corrupting and damaging consequences of unjust human behavior. In Qur’an, 30:41, 42:30 and 13:11, explicit calamities, afflictions and forms of corruption among human beings are considered to be the results of human misdeeds. What is more, Qur’an, 13:11 reveals that changes in the condition (positive or negative) of any nation relates to prior individual change in its people.

Tabataba’i argues that social corruption may occur with or without human manipulation. Sometimes corruption occurs within a given human plan. Events such as wars, social insecurity, poverty and national or international oppression are the work of human oppressors. Societies may also suffer from other forms of corruption which occur spontaneously and without any human plan. Horrible earthquakes, storms, floods, droughts and shortage of rainfall are other types of corruption or calamities that are beyond our ability to foresee (Tabataba’i vol. 8, 197 & vol. 16, 195).

All these examples are, as the Qur’an reveals, the outcome of unjust human social behavior. For Tabataba’i the link between human behavior and other functioning elements of the universe which cause improvement or corruption on earth resembles the relationships which exist between various parts of the body in health and sickness. Human beings do not behave in isolation from the order of the universe (Tabataba’i 1970, vol. 8, 196). Sadr’s theory of the interrelationship between human social behavior and the quality of life (which is partly the result of human access to natural resources) will be complete if we analyze it in the context of these three verses which mention the negative consequences of human social behavior. Sadr’s thought alludes to this type of relationship, but he does not provide the related verses from the Qur’an.

To illustrate the impact of education on this mutual link, I have to maintain that Qur’an, 5:66, among all the above-mentioned verses, has direct reference to the establishment of the contents of the Torah and the Bible. These two texts are indeed examples of the prophetic curriculum. As Eisner states, curriculum plays a central role in education. He observes that “like the systole and diastole of the beating heart, curriculum and teaching reside at the center of education” (Eisner 1992, 302). This emphasis, of course, does not connote neglect of the importance of other elements. However, it points out the vital role of curriculum and teaching in education.

As I mentioned earlier, the Prophets and the holy Books are two main tools for divine education. Prophets aim to teach humankind in accordance with the content of the holy Books. This education must first lead to the establishment of a religious values system inside the believers and then to the establishment of social justice at the social level. The contents of the holy Books are instructions on how people need to be purified in order that they behave justly. This purification and just social behavior will lead to a full access to natural resources. Sadr also explains the link between social reconstruction and the values education of citizens in the same society (Sadr 1979, 141–2). The messages included in other two verses (72:16; 7:96) also imply educational concern. Keeping to the right way and faith and piety,
which are themselves the results of self–development, are the targeted aims in prophetic education.

Therefore, an analytical approach to the three above–mentioned verses indicates that prophetic education is a linking element between self–development, social justice and a full access to natural resources.

Sadr then concludes that, according to these same three verses (72:16, 5:66, 7:96), a balanced distribution of power, wealth and natural resources in society (social justice), a fundamental task of all heavenly religions, will lead to an increase of wealth, blessings and well–being. If individuals’ relationships with one another are just, they will have a better and more qualified access to nature. The amount and the kind of natural resources possessed depend on the level of a just social interrelationship (Sadr 1979, 226–7). For the Qur’ân, as we have seen, the above–mentioned social norm is not limited to Muslim society. The second verse talks about Jews and Christians and includes them under the same norm as Muslims. Therefore, the core point in this Qur’ânic norm is an inclusive religious perspective which assigns a central role to true faith and piety. This differs from a secular and scientific interpretation which looks for a non–religious element in social norms.

Sadr also insists that this link between an individual’s relationship with nature on the one hand and his social relationship (social justice) on the other is not something related to the divinity or hidden aspects of Qur’ânic teachings. Although this aspect undoubtedly forms a part of Muslim beliefs, the Qur’ân in these verses provides a social norm which occurs in history and society, Sadr argues. In an unjust society, a group or a class or a political system may dominate the population, resulting in unjust social interactions. People usually follow the dominant socio–political structure. Society then disintegrates. The human and natural resources in an unjust society are blocked or destroyed, resulting in a weak collective control over nature. On the contrary, in a just and God–centered society all discrimination dissolves since all groups and individuals experience an equal relationship with Allah and consequently among themselves. No one can claim any priority over anyone else. Those who are more pious and behave more justly are more honored. The outcome is unity and the integration of all human resources and other utilities (Sadr 1978, 226–8).

Pharaonic society, according to Sadr’s terminology, is a disintegrated society. The Qur’ân provides examples of these societies that fit the pattern of a dominant–subordinate power relationship. The root of the difference between a God–centered and a secular unjust society goes back to the impact of two patterns of values and ideals. In a Pharaonic society, values are formed based on wealth and power and involve bitter competition. The values system in a God–centered society on the other hand derives from a religious world–view at whose core is the unity of God. True belief in the unity of God unites all humankind under one umbrella. This core discredits all types of man–made discrimination. Humankind, with all its particularities is deemed as one single family. Stratification and unjust classification is, according to the Qur’ân (Qur’an, 28:4), characteristic of a Pharaonic society (Sadr 1978, 228–9).

Two Qur’ânic verses allude to the above–mentioned unity:
“Surely this is your nation, one single nation, and I am your Lord, therefore, worship me,” (Qur’an, 21:92).

“Surely this is your nation, one single nation, and I am your Lord, be careful (of your duty) to me.” (Qur’an, 23:52).

My conclusion is that since the words *umma wahida* (single united nation) in the above two verses appear after the narration of some prophetic events, it is reasonable to conclude the possibility of the establishment of a just and united society which incorporates various nations. The idea of one single nation in the Qur’an encourages us to think of the possibility of a global village which includes various cultures and unites different nations under one single umbrella. That utopian society is one which is God-centered. Following Allah’s rules and being pious before the divine instructions are the uniting element. A real sustained social co-existence is related, according to the above-mentioned verses, to the type of values inculcation and ideals selection practiced therein.

Whatever the meaning of the Qur’anic term *umma* (nation) with its numerous textual variants – e.g., in these two verses it refers to the prophets, or their religions or their true people (nations) – the uniting element is Allah. Therefore, followers of the prophets throughout history, despite their differences in terms of time and place, local culture and values, are regarded as one single nation. This is because of the uniting role of Allah and educational impact of His prophets in just societies. All prophets, although sent to different nations, have brought one message and direct their followers toward one single target.

On the contrary, when the Qur’an talks about unjust (Pharaonic) societies, it considers them to be disintegrated. This is because of the oppressive and dominating powers which are replaced by Allah in just societies. In an unjust society, relationships are always oppressive from one side and oppressed on the other. Each group attempts to obtain more interests and carry less expenses. When human resources are treated unjustly and are destroyed, society loses out on the potential that lay in these resources. Each group attempts to take care of its own interests and protect itself from assimilation or destruction (Sadr 1978, 229–30). There is no social integration then.

I think Sadr’s conclusion will be better understood if we relate it to the explanation of Tabataba’i. The discourse of the three above-mentioned verses (72:16, 5:66, 7:96) hints at a metaphysical message, too. The expressions of *min fawqihim* 11(from above them), *min al-sama’* 12(from the heaven) and *ma’an ghadaqa* 13(plenty of water) allude to the impact of metaphysical elements. These outcomes, all of which are under our control, are related to the earth. The present level of human knowledge is ineffective, however, when it comes to manipulating the heavens. Humankind, with its present level of knowledge, is unable to manage the rainfall or to intervene against destructive floods. 14

Therefore, we can conclude that human behavior has both earthly and heavenly outcomes which facilitate or prevent their access to natural resources. These outcomes are explainable based on sociological and theological understandings. They constitute the Islamic culture of development and call
our attention to the religious values elements of development.

**Concluding Educational Remarks**

Unlike Marx, Sadr develops a conflict theory which traces all sorts of social tensions back to an inner conflict. He argues that social conflicts are, indeed, expressions of inner, unresolved conflicts. For Sadr (1984, 93), inner conflicts happen between two types of values and desires which then construct the foundations of the human values structure. It is unlikely that human beings can ever overcome this inner conflict without the help of prophetic education. Prophets instruct human beings in internal and external guiding signs, and in the nature and the method of constructing inner values and desires (self-notification). They also aim to help human beings to overcome their inner conflict by lining up on the side of divine values (self-purification). For Sadr (1979, 188) two types of values, Satanic and divine, interface within human souls. One stems from their corporeal dimension while the other has its source in their in-corporeality. Finally, they teach individuals in according to the content of the divine books (revelation) and wisdom (reason/hikmat).

Unless one can overcome this inner conflict in favor of the divine side, one’s behavior at the social level will be problematic. Sadr proposes that the establishment of social justice begins with self-values-construction. He asserts that human beings, according to a Qur’anic point of view, are created with a two-fold inner structure (Qur’an, 91:8). This structure usually leads to an inner conflict. Human values construction dramatically depends on the way that one solves this conflict. False processes of values-making will lead human beings to absolutize pathologically limited ideals and values. The process of values making, for Sadr, will be healthy and stable if it originates from a religious world-view which places God at the center. If this values construction happens consciously, it meets the human psychological need to have absolute values and ideals.

If this inner conflict remains unresolved, the values system will be confusing or unstable. It will entail identity crisis and values disease. Prophetic teachings are the complementary element which helps individuals to overcome this inner conflict and construct a stable religious values system. For Sadr, prophetic education is a way of developing attitudes and religious values system to help citizens to participate actively in social justice.

My own finding out of this paper is that Sadr’s theory relates the establishment of social justice to self-values-construction. The stages that link individual values construction to social justice are the following. The starting point is the construction of an Islamic world-view. The successful outcome of this stage will usually result in piety and self-abstinence. Piety is the core value which can lead to the establishment of the Islamic moral values system. An established moral values system, furthermore, leads to self-control.

In other words, Sadr proposes a model which illustrates the impact of prophetic education on social change. He maintains that prophets are sent to educate individuals and citizens in order that they may build a just society. To do so they begin with individuals. Through divine books, they attempt to educate
people self-conscientized of their inner potentialities and inner challenges. This conscientization will result in personal efforts to construct the core element of piety. Pious citizens will behave justly when they interface with other individuals at a social level. A citizen who successfully passes these stages willingly participates in the establishment of social justice.

From an Islamic viewpoint, therefore, any just form of social construction must begin from individual values development. This is why the latter is regarded in Islamic moral education as the greater and major campaign (al-jihad al-akbar).

Social tensions, in Sadr’s theory, stem from problems related to the individual’s values system. Unresolved inner conflict leads to the construction of a diseased values system. A citizen with this characteristic will have a problematic relationship with society and nature. This problematic relationship will promote diseased values among citizens. It will then inaugurate an even more damaging cycle of events. Unrestricted access to wealth and power without a divinely constructed values system will lead to the construction of a new values system which is centered on wealth and power. This diseased values system facilitates social oppression.

The next step is a Pharaonic social stratification (to borrow the language of the Qur’an) which results in social frustration and the disintegration of human resources. These oppressive power relationships eventually lead to what Sadr calls social death. Therefore, values illiteracy, associated with a state of wealth and power, fosters a feeling of wealth and privilege. This psychological background motivates people to project their inner conflict onto a dominant-subordinate power relationship. Sadr, accordingly, concludes that impious use of wealth and power will change the pattern of power relationships. The establishment of social justice should thus focus on individual values construction.

Yet there remain untouched questions related to Prophetic curriculum planning. I am still uncertain as to what Sadr might have proposed in explaining the particular method of prophetic moral education. How can this method help individuals to solve their inner conflict? How do prophets enable individuals to build the core value of piety? What are the supporting elements when intervening factors jeopardize piety or create new inner conflicts? The answer must involve a process of educational investment which is distinguished by a religious approach. Nor have I explored in full the characteristics of how a constructive or destructive values system results from individual attempts to overcome inner conflicts.

Another key educational point in Sadr’s theory of social change is his emphasis on the necessity of educational investment in the most vulnerable classes in society. Those who suffer from values poverty or a diseased values system and cannot construct a stable values system must receive a better & more qualified values education. In Sadr’s terminology they are the self-oppressors. I assume that in Sadr’s model, values poverty is as crucial as problems in other aspects. We may consider a group as poor or problematic in a society when it suffers from poverty, sickness, lack of income or political oppression.

The most vulnerable group for Sadr is the one which suffers from values poverty. Instability and values
fluctuation create frustrating circumstances for this group. Members of this group are handicapped in their relationships with society and nature. The root of the problem is that they are value-ly diseased.

Based on the quality of their power relationships, Sadr divides societies into Pharaonic and just communities. Self-oppression, in Sadr’s model, derives from remaining silent within a Pharaonic social context. A healthy values education educates citizens to live in a just society. For Sadr, social life and death depend on just or unjust social classification. The root lies in the quality of values education. The possibility of one global nation will increase when the world moves from a Pharaonic to a just power relationship. This movement essentially depends on the construction of a God–centered values system among human beings. As long as we suffer from inner conflict and values disease, social justice will remain merely a dream.

**Selected Bibliography**


1. According to Shi’i exegetes, this chapter is the first chapter of the Qur’an that was revealed to the prophet Muhammad. (see Tabataba’i 1970, vol. 20, 322–23)

2. Although the addressee in these verses is the Prophet Muhammad, the divine aim of revelation is to educate the entire human race. The prophets are intermediaries. This idea is reemphasized in Qur’an, 17:106. As this verse reveals, God sent the Qur’an gradually, over the course of twenty-three years, to the Prophet Muhammad in order for him to read to the people the content of revelation and to educate them accordingly (Tabataba’i 1970, vol. 20, 323).

3. Interestingly, in Qur’an, 55:4 it is revealed that God has taught humankind how to express itself and communicate with other people. People are endowed with the capability to learn how to express themselves and engage in verbal and written communication (Tabataba’i 1970, vol. 19, 95). This verse refers to the verbal aspect of the divine education besides the above-mentioned verse, which alludes to the written dimension. Moreover, since this verse mentions that the Qur’an was provided through prophetic education before referring to human creation and their endowment with verbal ability, it deals with an educational aspect that is beyond humankind’s ontological aspect.

4. Tabataba’i quotes from Tabarsi several traditions interpreting the two towns mentioned here as referring to Mecca and Ta’if, the two most important trade centers at the time of the Prophet Muhammad (see Tabataba’i 1991, vol. 18, 158–9).

5. The mutual relationship between social justice and full access to natural resources in this verse is explained as follows: “And if the people of the towns had believed and guarded (against evil) We would certainly have opened up for them blessings from the heavens and the earth, but they rejected, so We overtook them for what they had earned.” I will explain this verse below.


7. A preliminary translation of each of these verses is as follows:

“Corruption has appeared on land and sea on the account of what the hands of humankind have earned, that (Allah) may make them taste a part of their deeds, that they may turn back (from Evil)” (Qur’an, 30:41).

“And whatever affliction befalls you, it is because of the things your hands have wrought, and (yet) He forgives most (of your faults)” (Qur’an, 42:30).

“Verily Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change their own conditions (from within).” (Qur’an, 13:11).

8. I may add to this category the emergence of life-threatening diseases such as AIDS and various types of cancer that affect a considerable portion of populations.

9. For Tabataba’i the claimed interrelationship between the two parts of this verse can be defended only if the Torah and the Bible are free from human manipulation. He argues however that these two texts are not those which were revealed to Moses and Jesus (Tabataba’i 1970, vol. 6, 38).

10. It seems that Tabataba’i explains these verses in al-Mizán as referring to a metaphysical relationship between human behavior and full accessibility to nature. (See Tabataba’i 1970, vol. 8, 205–7).


14. While I was writing this research, I was among those who experienced the 1998 ice storm in eastern Canada. The entire province of Quebec in addition to the eastern part of the province of Ontario suffered from one of the most devastating storms of the century. This storm paralyzed two or three million citizens in one of the most developed countries of the world. A secular review of this occurrence would be that it was consequences of the anger of the Mother Nature. A religious view of this storm might be that it was a warning from God. The storm warns people about the negative consequences of their behavior before God and His will. It shows us that despite our invented utilities, we cannot escape the heat and darkness of a storm which affected only one or two provinces. Human beings feel the results of their misdeeds even though they feel they have some control over nature. People need to improve their relationships with society and nature as God’s vicegerent on earth.
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